

WASHINGTON--On Wednesday, November 14, Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) voted for the conference report of HR 1429, Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, which was sent to President Bush for final approval after gathering overwhelming bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Congressman Joe Sestak, a Member of the House Committee on Education and Labor, was an appointed conferee member in the joint House-Senate Conference for this bill.

— Head Start, started by President Johnson in 1965, is the premier national school readiness program in the United States. It has served well over 25 million low-income children to be better prepared to succeed in school and later in life. Head Start aims to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all Americans with the opportunity to thrive.

“I believe the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 will continue and enhance the success of Head Start. The continued funding of this program is critical to providing low-income children with the tools they need to succeed,” said Congressman Sestak, “Studies have demonstrated that for every dollar we invest in pre-school children, our country receives as much as seven dollars in return in increased economic productivity and reduced crime as adults. We must continue to invest in the future our country.”

This bill reauthorizes and reinvigorates this great program by improving teacher and classroom quality by improving teacher qualifications, ensuring that staff members receive better training, and create professional development plans for full-time staff.

“Head Start teachers are critical at the time of a child’s cognitive reasoning development,” said Congressman Sestak. “This is why, in addition to supporting the vital provisions of this bill, I passed an amendment earlier this year on the House floor to provide loan forgiveness to dedicated Head Start teachers.”

Congressman Sestak’s amendment would forgive loans up to \$10,000 for Head Start and Early Head Start teachers upon completion of a Bachelor’s degree and three years’ work in the program.

This bill also strengthens focus on school readiness by updating standards using the best research available and aligning Head Start performance standards with Stat early learning standards. Furthermore, it will ensure access to Head Start to more children by increasing its

outreach level and ensuring that children receive the most help during their critical development years. This bill enhances opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in Head Start.

This bill will ensure that Head Start centers are well-run, effective, and fairly governed by requiring failing programs to re-compete for their grants using an application review process and strengthening the monitoring process. It will also boost coordination between Head Start and other programs for children to better meet the needs of working families.

Finally, it will strengthen comprehensive services for families of Head Start children by placing greater emphasis on early identification of child and family mental health needs and requiring programs to implement best-practices for family service workers.

The President's FY 2008 Budget would reduce funding for the Head Start by \$100 million, which would mean approximately 13,500 fewer children would be able to enroll into the program next year. The Appropriations Bill passed by Congress would increase funding for Head Start by \$154 million, or 2.2% over FY 2007.

"I am very proud of the Conference results. I believe this bill will improve, enhance, and continue the successful legacy of this vital program. I hope that President Bush continues the great work of Head Start, and in line with the bi-partisanship of this bill, signs this reauthorization into law," said Congressman Sestak.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*